

ESSAY

National Identity and Transylvanian Cultural Interferences in the 19th Century

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Abstract. Lucian Drimba, acknowledged as a literary historian and critic through his research on the Transylvanian cultural phenomenon, in the second half of the 19th century and the beginnings of the Romanian theater, remains a landmark for making known Iosif Vulcan's works. His impressive activity, conducted by the editor of "Familia" newspaper, recognized by his exegetes by its complexity and diversity, is presented by literary historian and critic Lucian Drimba both during the volumes of both his works and in the scientific papers published in the annals of the University of Oradea, as well as articles published in various periodicals and specialty journals. In the context of the Transylvanian scholar's concerns, the activity of the Kisfaludy Organization is appreciated by the literary historian and critic as a particularly important one by recognizing Iosif Vulcan's merits on the field of culture as a defender of the national cultural identity and the initiator of the cultural interferences between the Romanians and Hungarians, mediated by his activity as a translator. Lucian Drimba's research, as a literary historian and critic, has the value not only to evoke the complex personality of the cultured person, Iosif Vulcan, but also to restore a complete, faithful and concrete picture of the Transylvanian cultural phenomenon in the second half of the 19th century.

Keywords: *literary historian, national identity, culture, activity, people, works*

Lucian Drimba, acknowledged as a literary historian and critic through his research on the Transylvanian cultural phenomenon, in the second half of the 19th century and the beginnings of the Romanian theater, remains a landmark for making known Iosif Vulcan's works. Four-volume edition of Iosif Vulcan's work (*Poems Narration Theater*, 1987, *Published articles*, 1989, *Travel Notes* (I), 1994, *Travel Notes* (II), *Correspondence*, 2002), *Eminescu at "Familia"* (1974), as well and the monograph of *Iosif Vulcan* (1974), constitute a unitary, faithful, unique image so far, through its complex form of presentation of the activity and work of the Transylvanian representative, a marked personality of the cultural life of the second half of the 19th century.

The impressive activity carried out by the editor of the "Familia" newspaper on the Romanian culture, acknowledged in its complexity and diversity by all his exegetes, is presented by the historian and literary critic Lucian Drimba, both during the volumes within the work, as well as in the scientific works published in the University of Oradea in articles published in different periodicals and specialized magazines: "Familia", "Limba și literatura" etc.

In the monograph of Iosif Vulcan, (1974), Lucian Drimba fixes his place in the time, making reference to the famous statement of Octavian Goga in Precursors: "It is, perhaps, our most representative cultural figure from the second half of the past century"¹ (in Transylvania). These words, representative of the outstanding personality of Iosif Vulcan, are complemented by the author: "A laborious personality, never tired, with beautiful aspirations that ennobled him, with remarkable initiatives and achievements, with a fruitful activity and a positive role in cultural, social and national life of his time, one of those hardworking and modest precursors of the great achievements"². During the monographic study, the literary historian presents in-depth information about the descent of Iosif Vulcan's family, originating from Muntenia, scholars with a solid religious tradition, in the paternal line, and with cultural-scientific openness, from the mother line, as well as the biographical course of the man of culture. Originating from Muntenia, Vulcan's family settled in the "endearing Transylvania", as lyrical Iosif Vulcan calls it several times, first in the Blaj "oppidum"; from there the great-grandfather Petru Vulcan moved to the township of Șinca-Veche in 1762, joining a regiment of guards. One member of the family was Samuil Vulcan, the bishop of Oradia, brother or cousin with another Peter Vulcan and uncle of Iosif Vulcan's father"³.

About Iosif Vulcan's biography and activity, the literary historian presents in-depth information, which is able to correct the errors made or to supplement with the less known aspects the information of the exegetes until then. Iosif Vulcan was born on March 31st, 1841 in the township of Holod, being the only surviving child, among the six born of the Greek Catholic priest Nicolae Vulcan of Holod (Bihor) and Victoria Irinyi. About Holod of those times, we learn that it was a significant area of the Greek-Catholic Episcopacy of Oradea, a rich township "with hardworking and wealthy people"⁴.

¹ Lucian Drimba, *Iosif Vulcan*, Editura Minerva, București, 1974, p. 5.

² Ibidem, p. 8.

³ Ibidem p. 15.

⁴ Ibidem, p.20.

In 1844, the priest Nicolae Vulcan was transferred to Leta-Mare, a larger and richer parish, when Iosif Vulcan was three years old. Thus, Leta Mare became, according to the literary critic, both the place of childhood and adolescence, as well as the place of refuge of an intellectual breakthrough youth, but also a place of eternal rest of the mother and grandparents. "Finishing the primary school at Leta-Mare"⁵, he is enrolled at the Roman-Catholic High School of the Premonstratensians from Oradea (nowadays, "Mihai Eminescu" High School), which he attended between 1851-1859, having as his teacher Alexandru Roman.

About the presence and influence of Professor Al. Roman on Iosif Vulcan, the literary historian describes the social and political climate of the time, mentioning the intervention of the Greek-Catholic bishop Vasile Baron de Erdely, because of which the Romanian language and literature department for many Romanian students was established at this high school, although at that time, in Transylvania, the languages taught in secondary schools were German and Hungarian. The first teacher appointed to the new department was Alexandru Roman, who was brought from the high school in Beiuș. Regarding Iosif Vulcan's claim that "he was his disciple"⁶, Lucian Drimba explains this statement and expresses the conditions under which Iosif Vulcan could have him as a teacher. Due to the fact that the Romanian language was the object of study only in 4th-8th grades, Al. Roman taught classes of Romanian language younger students, too, except for the duties of the chair.

"Vulcan could not have a teacher in this official status only on his successor in the schools in Beiuș and Oradea, i.e. Dionisie Pășcuțiu."⁷ In the footnotes, the literary historian reproduces the statements of Iosif Vulcan from *Familia* newspaper", regarding professor Alexandru Roman's influence and merits in completing his studies, but also presents the scientific activity of D. Pășcuțiu, recognized as a defender of the national identity through his researches in the linguistic field, demonstrating that both Romanian teachers contributed to Iosif Vulcan's spiritual and moral formation.

Since the high school years, the beginning period, the vocation of the adolescent is affirmed in directions that would last the whole life: for literature, original creations and translations from universal literature, and another well-defined vocation, for journalism. The high school studies are continued, at his

⁵ Ibidem, p. 20.

⁶ Lucian Drimba, *Iosif Vulcan*, Editura Minerva, București, 1974, p. 23.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

father's request, with the "Faculty of Law" of the University of Budapest. However, the literary and cultural concerns are the dominant ones. He would publish an article and a few original poems in George Barițiu's "Sheet for the mind, heart and literature" („Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură”) in Brasov, but his name would appear mainly in "Concordia" magazine, which had Alexandru Roman as an editor, appointed professor at the Department of Romanian Language and Literature of the Hungarian University of Budapest.

During these study years, Iosif Vulcan had overcome the uncertainty of any beginning, he is one of the founding members of the "Petru Maior" Society in Budapest, created for Romanian students in the Hungarian capital. At the same time, he was also remarked in publishing, when he had already "betrays the presence of a journalist"⁸. The interest in literary and cultural issues is also acknowledged through the collaboration through articles, poems and prose in different periodicals in Transylvania and Budapest and Vienna as well.

This stage is appreciated as one of the preparations for the publication of the most important magazine by I. Vulcan in Budapest, "Familia", an encyclopedic journal of culture and literature, whose first issue dates back to June 5/17, 1865 and which he tirelessly edited and published it, during the nearly 42 years, until December 1906. Its platform presents him as a defender of the national core and identity, illuminator of the villages and the nation, without launching himself into political debates, considering that it was a Romanian magazine in a Hungarian or Austro-Hungarian dualist state, characterized by a severe attitude in the politics of minorities.

In chapter IV of the monograph, entitled *Initiative and cultural action*, Lucian Drimba presents, in chronological order, the most important cultural and social actions of the Transylvanian scholar, which he initiated ("Petru Maior" Literary Society, STR, Bihoreana) or in which he participated actively (the Society of Reading in Oradea, Astra, the Kisfaludy Society, the Romanian Academy, the Society of Archeologists and Historians in Oradea). The author mentions the enthusiasm and responsible involvement of Iosif Vulcan in all these actions, which, together with the rich advertising activity, collaborator and editor of several periodicals and editor of three magazines, make up an overall, unitary and coherent image of his entire activity. At the same time, they contribute to outline of the moral portrait of the

⁸ Cornelia Ștefănescu, *Un entuziast: Iosif Vulcan*. In: „România literară”, no. 28, 16-22 July 2003 (Year XXXVI).

cultured person, animated by the highest ideals in the spirit of the unity of all Romanians.

The research on the activity of Iosif Vulcan within the Kisfaludy Society is valorized, as an independent part, in the chapter IV of the monograph in 1974, and it is one of the topics addressed in the *I. Vulcan, member of Astra and Kisfaludy Society* scientific paper, published in the volume of *Scientific papers*, from the annals of the Pedagogical Institute Oradea, in 1971.

The abstract of the research highlights the multiple responsibilities of the Transylvanian scholar, the author specifying the interval of only three years, which passed from the date of the election of Iosif Vulcanca as a member of the Astra Society and until his investment, as an external member, in the Kisfaludy Society, the Hungarian writers' society in Pesta. The literary historian appreciates ab initio that the election of I. Vulcan in this society constitutes an important event, with a special charge, but also a recognition of his merits as a cultural entertainer of the Romanians in these parts and of his sincere contribution to the development of the bonds between the two nations, based on the mutual knowledge of the specific cultural values. In appreciating this new activity of I. Vulcan, of great importance in the context of his many concerns, the author specifies: "to this action, the devoted Romanian cultural entertainer will not give up any moment, until the end of his life."⁹ The literary historian also pointed out that, up to 1871, when he was 12 years old in Pesta, in the capital of Hungary, Iosif Vulcan was recognized in the circle of Hungarian writers and cultural people, both through publicity and literary activity, as an activist for emancipation, a fighter for his nation culture, defending national identity and promoting the spiritual values heritage. Another aspect noted by the author is that I. Vulcan's writing and attitude registered "not the slightest trace of manifestation of chauvinistic nationalism which, he was convinced, would not have provided real services neither to Romanians nor to other peoples from monarchy, but, on the contrary, an intensification of the dissensions between them."¹⁰

Registering the activity of Romanian translator of the works of some Hungarian writers, together with German and French poets, the author signals the year 1862 when I. Vulcan published in the pages of the newspaper "Concordia" the translation of the novel by Jokai Mor, "Capul lui Iordachi". In 1870 another successful translation appeared signed by the same author, the short story, "Ce este sub

⁹ Lucian Drimba, *Iosif Vulcan*, Editura Minerva, București, 1974, p. 248.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*

pământ”. The activity of translating some Hungarian writers is continued and used later through publications and in the pages of the “Familia” magazine, an interval in which he would translate into Hungarian language lyric creations belonging to V. Alecsandri, D. Bolintineanu and creations belonging to the Romanian folklore. In writing these aspects, the author confesses the intention of Iosif Vulcan to facilitate the proximity of these people and cultivate the friendship between them, having the conviction: “that mutual respect must be born from the exchange of cultural values.”¹¹

Within that context, Lucian Drimba presents the circumstances in which the society was founded, its beginnings dating back to 1830, with the death of the poet and playwright Kisfaludy Karoly, at the initiative of a group of ten friends, whose purpose was to raise funds for building a memorial statue. Over time it transformed, and since 1836 it has become a literary society, taking the name of the missing writer. Of the multiple concerns of the society, the author mentions the most important ones: stimulating the development of Hungarian literature, by awarding, annually, the most outstanding literary works, as well as translating into Hungarian the literature and folklore of the peoples under Austro-Hungarian rule, with the purpose of making them worldwide known.

The literary historian emphasizes the merits of the “Familia” editor, appreciated by the society, “by translating Romanian literature into Hungarian”¹² and because “he made Hungarian poetry known in Romanian”¹³, facts by virtue of which, at its meeting on January 25th, 1871, the members of the Kisfaludy Society unanimously elect I. Vulcan as its external member, the internal member being able to hold it only the Hungarian writers. In the footnotes, which supplement or gloss over the information presented, the author mentions that the Hungarian newspaper „Patria noastră și străinătatea” published, on this occasion, Iosif Vulcan portrait and biography. The Transylvanian scholar occupies, soon after, his place within the society, the first participation being mentioned on February 12th, 1871, on the occasion of its annual meeting. The literary historian introduces, in the multitude of information, passages, notes, mentions that produce delight. Participating in the annual meeting of the company, during the banquet attended by the usual toasts, Iosif Vulcan was greeted by the poet Szasz Karoly, as the first Romanian among the

¹¹ Lucian Drimba, *I. Vulcan, membru al Astrei și al Societății Kisfaludy în Lucrări științifice*, Filologie, 1971, Institutul Pedagogic Oradea, p. 146.

¹² Ibidem

¹³ Ibidem

Hungarian writers. His answer, written by the literary historian, represents a commitment to the cultural closeness between Romanians and Hungarians and expresses, in the alternative, the deep understanding of I. Vulcan in the face of a human act: "Responding to the greeting, Joseph Vulcan committed to work in this way that the links between Romanians and Hungarians should be as intimate as possible and emphasized that by his choice, in fact, a friendly hand extended to the Romanian nation; therefore, he shook the outstretched hand."¹⁴

In the footnotes, the author fully reproduces the text of Iosif Vulcan's toast, eloquent for illustrating the atmosphere of enthusiasm and spiritual, cultural openness, but also for highlighting the attributes of Iosif Vulcan, of which patriotism and modesty are the most important. "Gentlemen! If I take a look at the two most outstanding Hungarian institutes of culture, if I examine the list of the members of the Scientific Academy and the Kisfaludyane Society, I see that I am the first Romanian who has the honor to have been elected to one of these societies, namely the second. I am not so ambitious, gentlemen, to seek the reason for this distinction in the value of my insignificant individuality, but I consider it only as a spiritual handshake, which the Hungarian nation offers through this society to the Romanian nation, of which I am a son. Thus, I receive the honor dedicated to me, and, shaking the warmly outstretched hand, I promise to work with my weak powers on this ground, so that our connections become as intimate as possible. I worship my cup in honor of that literary society that comes to give a helping hand to my nation and which through its translations of the folk poetry of the various nations of the homeland strengthens this connection even more! Long live the Kisfaludyan Society!"¹⁵

Another moment highlighted by the author, in the chronological presentation of the events, is the speech of I. Vulcan as of May 31st, 1971, entitled "Romanian Folk Poetry", with which he solemnly entered the society, among the personalities of Hungarian culture, being the first non-Hungarian member of the society that delivered a reception speech. In this regard, Lucian Drimba emphasizes the enthusiasm of the progressive spirits of the Society, that not having the opportunity to know the values of the Romanian culture until then, came to meet I. Vulcan's speech with an undisguised appreciation: "Our esteemed member, on this very moment, with its interesting data (about the Romanian folk poetry) also

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 147.

¹⁵ Lucian Drimba, *Iosif Vulcan*, Editura Minerva, București, 1974, p. 251.

contributes to the knowledge of the people, it will outline the poetry of that people with whom we have not yet had the opportunity to get to know more closely. Let's get acquainted with the poetry of this people, get to know the people themselves."¹⁶

The author highlights the elaborate research of Iosif Vulcan, who was careful to bring to light both the artistic valences of our folk poetry and those of preserving the national specific, using numerous fragments taken from the collection of V. Alecsandri and At. M. Marienescu, translated into Hungarian. Throughout the monographic study, the literary historian notes that Iosif Vulcan, great admirer and treasurer of popular poetry, has dealt extensively with folkloric creation, always talking about it with delight, either in words and dissertations, or in articles. For him, "folk poetry has at least a double value: artistic – as it contains the true unmatched of the anonymous creative genius, which presumably proves the solidity of Alecsandri's claim that «the Romanian is born a poet!» – and documentary – because it is reflected in its history, living conditions, characteristic moral-psychological traits and aspirations of the Romanian nation. For these particular qualities, he recommends not once to the writers as a source of inspiration, believing that popular literature is "the source meant to nourish national literature", able to confer "the charm of characteristic originality", to ensure its durability and to defend it from "the heat of foreign literature."¹⁷ According to the mention of the literary historian, from the footnotes, Iosif Vulcan's speech was first published in the "A Kisfaludy tarsasag Evlapjai" yearbook, vol. VII, Pesta, 1872.

The record of the literary historian on the impact of that moment is a thoroughly one, recording both the concrete aims, as well as the enthusiasm and appreciation of the members of the society and the Romanians attending the meeting. According to the minutes of the meeting, I. Vulcan's translations "will soon be included in a collection of Romanian folklore, edited by the Kisfaludy Society"¹⁸, and Iustin Popfiu appreciates "the new triumph that brings back the Romanian genius to the world."¹⁹ The event is recorded in praiseworthy terms both by the "Familia" magazine, as well as by other Romanian and foreign publications, and the

¹⁶ Lucian Drimba, *I. Vulcan, membru al Astrei și al Societății Kisfaludy în Lucrări științifice*, Filologie, 1971, Institutul Pedagogic Oradea, p. 147.

¹⁷ Lucian Drimba, *Iosif Vulcan, Poezii, Proză, Teatru*, Editura Minerva, București, 1987, p. 17.

¹⁸ Lucian Drimba, *I. Vulcan, membru al Astrei și al Societății Kisfaludy în Lucrări științifice*, Filologie, 1971, Institutul Pedagogic Oradea, p. 148.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

proposals regarding the volume, to be preceded by the speech of I. Vulcan, as an introductory study, along with other translations of the Romanian folk poetry, illustrates the appreciation enjoyed by the Transylvanian scholar.

In the footnotes, Lucian Drimba presents the titles of the publications that recorded the event, reproducing, in the descriptive passage of that moment, the special appreciation of "Ziarul din Pesta" newspaper: "Many of the newer Hungarian poets would like to handle it original prowess, characteristic of the Hungarian language that we observed in this Romanian compatriot of ours."²⁰ The satisfaction of the cultured person is reproduced by the literary historian through the word of thanks regarding the received assessments, but also by highlighting the value of the national cultural heritage: "We feel happy that we could contribute on a new ground to the glorification of the genius of our people."²¹ The reverberations of the appreciation of Iosif Vulcan among the members of the Kisfaludy Society are recorded by Lucian Drimba and in 1872, when he was invested, as a result of the unanimous trust of the Hungarian colleagues, with the quality of critical reference on two collections of translations from our folk poetry, belonging to Ember Gyorgy and Iulian Grozescu, which the company intended to publish, in its own publishing house, under the title of "Romanian folk songs".

The author presents the responsible and assumed implication of Iosif Vulcan, characteristic of his way of working, available in all fields of activity: relevant observations of the report submitted to the company, on January 31st, 1872, regarding the fidelity of the original text and the reproduction of the musicality of the original expression in translations submitted for selection. Mentioning the quality of Iosif Vulcan as a good speaker of Hungarian and a skillful translator thus becomes fully justified.

According to its notifications, appreciated by other members, Kisfaludy Society will publish, just over five years, in 1877, the volume entitled "Roman nepdalok" ("Romanian folk songs"), which included, besides the translations of the two mentioned authors, indicated by Iosif Vulcan, also other poems translated by the "Familia" editor, preceded by his speech, as an introductory study. In the footnotes, Lucian Drimba points out that the report, kept in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was published by Samuel Domokos under the title, twice incorrectly, "Contributions to the knowledge of the Hungarian-Romanian

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 149.

²¹ Lucian Drimba, *Iosif Vulcan*, Editura Minerva, București, 1974, p. 253.

folkloric links” in the "Revista de Folclor", VIII (1963), and that the author was also wrong in claiming that Iosif Vulcan was elected a member of the Kisfaludy Society in 1872.

The volume, totaling 164 pages and 123 pieces of the most inspired of our folk creation, contains 17 doina and 13 ballads translated by Iosif Vulcan, some of which are known to members of the Society, being read during the sessions. In the footnotes, Lucian Drimba, highlights the contribution of I. Vulcan to this volume editing, according to an information from "Familia", XIII, 1877. Thus, he specifies the quantitative proportion of the summed translations, according to which Gh. Ember has 9 ballads and 22 doina, and I. Grozescu, 9 ballads and 35 doina, "which does not add enough to Vulcan's translations to give the total of 123."²²

The literary historian notes that Iosif Vulcan has also translated other poems, published in different Hungarian newspapers or in the Kisfaludy Society yearbook. The 1880 album contains, together with works signed by 39 members of the society, and the translation of Iosif Vulcan of "Ștefan cel mare și mama sa", poem by D. Bolintineanu, after two years before he had read "Cântecul gintei latine" poem. Regarding the translations made by Iosif Vulcan, the author completes, in the footnotes, with information taken from „Familia”, indicating titles of some popular creations consecrated: "Argeș Monastery", whose reading in the meeting of 1873, aroused the request of the president of the company to publish it in anal, as well as the translation of the "Inelul și corbul", "Jicman crai", "Bărbatul urât", "Craiu și sorăsa", "Bradul și teiul" ballads from the collections of V. Alecsandri and Simion Fl. Marian, read in the 1875 meeting.

The complex and precise information, presented by the literary historian Lucian Drimba, restores and completes an anthological page of our local and national culture, casting light on lesser-known moments and episodes, but eloquent in the context of the evolution of the Transylvanian cultural phenomenon. Finally, the appreciations and conclusions of Lucian Drimba illustrate the importance of the activity for 10 years (1871-1880) of the cultured person Iosif Vulcan within the Kisfaludy Society, by which he had a major contribution to the knowledge of the folk poetry by the Hungarian people and to the development of the bonds between the two nations, based on the cultural closeness between them. During the research, features of the less well-known moral portrait, Iosif Vulcan, appearing by conception,

²² Lucian Drimba, *I. Vulcan, membru al Astrei și al Societății Kisfaludy în Lucrări științifice, Filologie*, 1971, Institutul Pedagogic Oradea, p. 150.

attitudes and facts as a humanist, open, cosmopolitan, visionary spirit, guided in all his actions of high respect for the cultural values of the people.

This collaboration between peoples, based on the respect and appreciation of the values of specific cultures, represents an example of multiculturalism and demonstrates Transylvanian cultural interference from the second half of the 19th century. It is part of a tradition illustrated by other prominent personalities of Romanian and Hungarian culture, a representative example, in this sense, being the sincere friendship relationship between the poets Octavian Goga and Ady Endre, which became a symbol of Transylvanian multiculturalism of that period.

The researches carried out by the historian and literary critic Lucian Drimba have the merit not only of evoking the complex personality of the cultured person Iosif Vulcan, activist for the unification of all Romanians and defender of the national identity, but also to restore an overall image, faithful and concrete about the Transylvanian cultural phenomenon of the second half of the 19th century.

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